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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by European Women's Lobby, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2006/1



Statement

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is a membership-based non-governmental organisation that brings together over 4000 women's organisations in Europe working together to promote equality between women and men and to ensure that gender equality and women's human rights are taken into consideration in all European Union policies.

For an integrated approach to achieve gender equality in decision-making

1. The under-representation of women in decision-making can be addressed only through an integrated approach; partial/sectorial measures are not enough. The pattern of whole social relations and structures requires examination and transformation.

2. The UN and its Member States have made strong commitments in relation to promoting women in decision-making. Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women commits all States Parties to "*take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life*". Its Article 4 states that the adoption of "*temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination*". The Beijing Platform for Action provides for a complete set of actions on women in power and decision-making, including an attention to institutional mechanisms of exclusions, unequal power relations and discriminatory attitudes and practices.

3. EWL stresses that a number of different mechanisms lead to the under-representation of women in decision-making, including: 1) Women's economic subordination: economic, social and cultural resources are necessary to attain political decision-making positions; 2) Symbolic factors linked to gender roles: political decision-making is still seen as a male domain and the distribution of tasks within the home continues to be gender-biased; 3) Electoral institutions, laws and functioning: electoral systems, holding of several mandates, role of political parties etc; 4) Economic and social structures, notably the lack of affordable services for the care of dependent persons create additional barriers.

4. The complexity of the problem therefore requires strong political will and a multifaceted approach, involving different actors.

5. EWL therefore urges the UN and its Member States to implement a concerted action plan involving different political fields and actors, in order to remove the existing barriers and to move towards gender equality in decision-making in all areas.

Achieving parity democracy: a challenge for democracy

6. In 2005, men occupied 84% of parliamentary seats in the world and women only 16%. Men therefore overwhelmingly dominate political decision-making, but also other fields, such as decision-making in international institutions, in the economic, social and financial areas as well as in conflict prevention and resolution across the world.

7. Inequalities in decision-making are a challenge for democracy, that is, democracy cannot be complete without the equal participation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels. The exclusion and discrimination mechanisms against women that are inherent to political systems and social structures need to be eradicated in order to achieve parity democracy and gender equality in decision-making. Political parties in particular play a crucial role as gatekeepers in excluding women from politics.

8. Parity is a strategy that aims at a profound transformation in the functioning of our democracies. Parity democracy implies the equal representation of women and men in decision-making positions. It is based on the idea that the essence of humanity is its duality as it is equally composed of women and men, and that both sexes should be represented whenever decisions are made that affect their lives.

9. EWL therefore calls on the UN and its Member States to adopt binding texts to ensure parity democracy and the equal representation of women and men in elected and nominated bodies at all levels of decision-making.

10. EWL calls on Member States to take action (including financial sanctions) for political parties to remove the obstacles to gender equality in decision-making, which are due to political parties structures and functioning.

11. EWL also calls on the UN and its Member States to ensure a gender balance in all national delegations at international level and to implement new mechanisms for delegations, which do not comprise a minimum number of representatives of each sex, to be penalised, for example through the removal of voting rights.

12. EWL has also launched a campaign for the election of a woman as the next Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2006 and urges Member States to seek qualified women candidates with a strong record and commitment towards global peace and security, human rights and women's rights and to vote for a woman during the elections.

Conclusions

13. Given the different barriers that exclude women from full participation in decision-making at all levels, it is the responsibility of society and of the State to change the way politics and other social structures function. Quotas or parity democracy are one way to compensate for the obstacles that women face.

14. Different countries across the world have used different strategies, but the pace of progress needs to be accelerated. In the last 15 years, 50 countries in the world have introduced legal quotas. Thanks to quotas, some countries such as Costa Rica or Mozambique do better than a number of European countries. This shows that a fast-track approach to achieve the necessary step of a critical mass of women in politics is possible.

15. However, parity democracy or the equal representation of women and men in decision-making does not only involve numbers, it is a condition for change and it implies a profound alteration of the social contract and structures, which for centuries has assigned different roles to women and men.